*The Faber Gallery of Oriental Art*

# BYZANTINE ICONS

403

*with an introduction and notes by*

*DAVID TALBOT RICE*

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क्रमसंख्या 403
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State Museum, Library, Lucknow

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# Introduction by David Talbot Rice

Our knowledge of the early history of icon painting depended until recently on a few isolated panels, which had found their way more or less by chance into collections at Kiev, Washington, Paris and elsewhere. But within the last few years a large and extensive series of icons preserved in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai has been published by Professor Sotiriou, and this, combined with discoveries made in the last twenty years or so in Russia and the Balkans, thanks to skilful cleaning, has very considerably extended our knowledge.

The oldest panels of the Christian world show an obvious debt to the mummy portraits of Hellenistic Egypt, with regard both to technique and to style. They are usually painted in the encaustic technique, where coloured waxes are manipulated with a hot rod; they are in a rugged, rather primitive style, with figures set frontally; the faces have large staring eyes and heavy features. Yet in the better work there is a high degree of realism; the modelling is full and the paintings are often moving and expressive. If the delicacy and picturesque detail of the mosaics and wall paintings of Italy, like the lovely Christ the Good Shepherd in Galla Placidia at Ravenna (*c.* 450) are absent on the one hand, and if on the other there are no hints of the grandeur and elegance of the Greek mosaics, as we see them exemplified in the churches of St. George (*c.* 400) or St. Demetrius (sixth–seventh centuries) at Salonica, there is none the less a profound spiritual feeling in the icons, and they may be in many respects compared with paintings of most recent times, as exemplified for example in the work of a Rouault.

The earliest of the Christian panels that have come down to us date probably from the seventh century. Already several distinct styles are apparent. That of which the most numerous examples survive may be called the eastern. It is represented on Sinai by a fragmentary panel showing the Nativity above, part of the Ascension group in the middle, and part of the Pentecost scene, the Giving of Tongues, below (pl. 2). Sotiriou dates it to between the seventh and ninth centuries.[1] A date in the later eighth or ninth century seems most likely. Wall paintings in Egypt, notably those at Baouit and Saqqara, are in a similar style, and rather later work of this monastic school appears in the rock-cut chapels of Cappadocia or Latmos in Asia Minor.

Whether work which was more sophisticated was done in the great city of Alexandria it is hard to say, for nothing in the way of painting has survived there. It has however for long been held that work of a more classical style was done there than in the countryside or in the monastic communities, and it may be that some of the more elegant of the Sinai icons reflect the Alexandrian manner. Among these may be noted a panel showing the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace (pl. 1). Sotiriou dates it to as early as the sixth century, but it is more probably to be assigned to the seventh.[2]

The theme was a favourite one in early times and appears more than once among the paintings of the Roman catacombs. The style is refined and delicate and the painter of this icon must have been trained in a school where classical ideas survived; his work is much more accomplished than that of the man who painted the icon illustrated on Plate 2. We do not know much about Alexandrine painting at first hand, for nothing has survived there, but ivories that can be assigned to Alexandria suggest that it was a centre where Greek thought and culture survived till quite a late date; we know that the encaustic technique was popular there; the icon shows similarities to ivories which are usually associated with the city. There is thus good reason to attribute the Sinai icon to Alexandria, and if it was indeed painted there, or by a man who had been trained there, the theory propounded by Avery that the more classical of the wall paintings in Santa Maria Antiqua at Rome were done by an Alexandrine painter who had fled to Rome at the time of the Islamic conquest in the first half of the seventh century seems very probable.[3] A seventh century date for the icon also is likely.

Our knowledge of painting in Italy in early times is much fuller than with regard to Alexandria, for the paintings on the walls of the catacombs extend in a continuous series from the third to the sixth century. There again however there are no panels that are certainly earlier than the sixth century. The most important of the panels in Rome is one bearing the Virgin and Child in the Church of Sta Francesca Romana. It is less severe, less primitive than are those of the eastern school and is to be assigned to a more sophisticated tradition.[4] Taken with the mosaics of Rome and Ravenna it suggests that work in Italy was not only of high quality but also corresponded more closely to the ideals of classical art than did that done in the East. But it represents the end rather than the beginning of a trend, for by the seventh century civilization in Italy had begun to decline; first the country had been overrun by the Goths; then it had seen a series of devastating campaigns in the days of Justinian; after his death the barbarian inroads were

[1] G. and M. Sotiriou, *Les Icones du Mont Sinai*, Athens, 1956, pl. 17. The text of the book is in Greek, with short summary in French.

[2] Sotiriou, pl. 12.

[3] "The Alexandrine style at Sta. Maria Antiqua, Rome," *Art Bulletin*, VII, 1925, p. 131.

[4] The most easily accessible reproduction in colour is that in the author's *Beginnings of Christian Art*, London, 1957, p. 112, pl. C.

Plate 1. *The Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace.* (See page 24)

opened up again. The mosaics and wall paintings of the eighth and ninth centuries that survive are in the main rather wooden and clumsy; the surprising thing indeed is that so much work of quality was done at all, considering the unsettled state of the country. The best work is perhaps to be assigned to immigrants, and it has been suggested that certain of the paintings in Santa Maria Antiqua at Rome are to be regarded as the work of an Alexandrine artist, while those at Castelseprio near Milan were also by a foreigner, though whether he came from Syria, Alexandria or Constantinople has depended on the preference of the scholars who have studied the paintings! Constantinople seems the most likely.

Unfortunately no painting survives from these early years that can be definitely attributed to Constantinople, but the ivories and the silverwork that were made there suggest that the panels produced in the city must have been refined, grand and elegant, showing only to a minor degree the influence of the cruder art characteristic of Syria and the East. But eastern influence was no doubt present. Frontal poses were probably usual, and as in later Byzantine art there was also certainly a considerable degree of stylisation, and if our second plate illustrates the typical monastic or eastern style and our first the Alexandrine, the third may be taken as illustrating a manner more closely related to that which was in vogue at the Byzantine Capital in early times, though the icon itself is not earlier than the eleventh century. It shows the Saints Procopios, Demetrios and Nestor (pl. 3).[1] They stand frontally in rather rigid attitudes, and there are no hints of the picturesque, half-face rendering that we see in the Angel in the scene of the Three Hebrews. But the work is finished and accomplished and has something of the elegance that we see in the miniature paintings that were done in Constantinople during the brilliant days of the Macedonian Emperors.

Though panel paintings from Constantinople or its neighbourhood that are earlier than the fourteenth century are few and far between, there are a few examples of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries that are in all probability to be assigned to the capital and with which the Sinai "Three Saints" may be compared. Most important is an icon showing SS. Philip, Theodore and Demetrios in the Hermitage Museum at Leningrad (pl. 4). It is probably to be dated to the early twelfth century. As in the Sinai icon, the figures stand frontally and the conception is hieratic, but it is made slightly less severe, firstly by the arcades in low relief which frame the figures and secondly

[1] Sotiriou, pl. 49.

because the handling is rather lighter and the faces more characterful and more individual. In fact the work is in general rather less hieratic, and this was a feature which seems to have characterised the more progressive work done after about 1225. Variations of this sort depended of course to a great extent on the individual who was responsible for painting the icon, but the painter in the East Christian world was so firmly controlled by the dictates of the church, that date and school tend to play a rather more important part in the determination of stylistic character than does personality. Thus work done in Asia Minor and the East remained, as in early times, more primitive and at the same time more expressive, while that done in the capital was always finished, polished and delicate, even if it was severe. But even at the capital the character was not uniform, for in the monasteries, which were recruited to a great extent from the East, work of a more primitive type was done, while in the workshops attached to the Imperial Palace elegance and grandeur were the hall-marks. This is clearly shown in the ivories, where obvious stylistic differences distinguish those done for the Emperors from the more general run done for private patrons or for the monasteries; it was no doubt equally so with the panel paintings.

A study of the ivories and mosaics shows that distinctions of date were also very important; though changes were less rapid than was usual in the West. Later Byzantine art was by no means as uniform as the older writers tended to believe. Thus in the tenth and earlier eleventh centuries a grand, classical style dominated, in any case in the court workshops which were responsible for such things as the famous Harbaville Triptych in the Louvre or the earlier mosaics in Sancta Sophia. In the later eleventh and the twelfth century however there was a change, either towards a more rigid academic manner, as in the mosaic known as the John panel in the south gallery of Sancta Sophia which was set up about 1118, or towards greater humanism, where personal expression and intimacy have a new part to play. The Saints on the icon illustrated on plate 4 show a hint of this, especially if they are compared with the rather earlier Sinai icon (pl. 3), but the change in this direction is more fully illustrated by the famous icon usually known as "Our Lady of Vladimir". It was painted in Constantinople in the early years of the second quarter of the twelfth century and was transported to Russia about 1130, where it was preserved in a series of monasteries and churches till the time of the Revolution; it is now the principal treasure of the Tretiakov Gallery.[1]

The icon is of quite considerable size, but it has been much restored and repainted throughout the centuries and only the heads of the Mother and Child and certain portions of the upper parts of the figures now represent the original work. But these portions are outstandingly lovely, intimate and tender. They constitute the most important example that has come down to us of the new, more personal style, which was soon to become predominant at Constantinople. Here the new approach is illustrated both by the nature of the painting and by the iconography. The work is thus refined and polished, while the face of the Child is pressed against that of the Virgin in affection; in the older conception of the theme the Child was held on one arm, apart, while with the other hand the Virgin pointed to Him, indicating Him as the Saviour of mankind; here we see stressed rather the love of mother for child and child for mother, and the whole conception of the painting is redolent of the same tender feeling.

Our Lady of Vladimir must have been in its day no more than one example of a new style and outlook, though a very outstanding one; to-day it stands almost alone among panels, though there are some important twelfth century wall paintings in the new manner in Macedonia which must have been done by a Constantinopolitan artist. The full development of the new style was thereafter interrupted at Constantinople by the crusading conquest of 1204, and it is hard to say what was done in the thirteenth century; some of the lovely miniature mosaics that constitute one of the principal art forms of later times may perhaps have been made during the Latin domination (1204–1261).

But in general the Latin conquest put a stop to production, and the invaders were also responsible for destroying a large proportion of the vast treasure that caused them such astonishment when they captured the city; and if anything survived the very systematic and wholesale looting of the Latins, it was destroyed at the time of the Turkish conquest of 1453, while what may have been carried off to Greece, the Balkans or Russia more often than not followed a similar fate when those countries were overrun by Turks or Mongols. Much also perished merely because of the inevitable destruction wrought by time and physical conditions; nowhere, in the more northern world, did the climate assist the preservation of such fragile materials as wooden panels, as it has done at Sinai. But on the evidence of wall paintings outside Constantinople it is fair to assume that the new, more personal and intimate style illustrated by "Our Lady of Vladimir" developed as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries progressed, and when the Orthodox emperors returned to Constantinople in 1261, the stage was set for the full flowering of the new style. It was this style that Millet termed that of the Byzantine Renaissance, though "Byzantine Revival" would perhaps be a better term, for though there was a certain return to classical forms, the new art did not really represent a rebirth of classical ideas in the way, say, that did the art of a Raphael or a Michaelangelo.

In addition to the stress that was laid on tenderness and intimacy, paintings done after about 1260 show certain other marked characteristics. First, the colours are more

[1] For an illustration in colour see the writer's King Penguin, *Russian Icons*, London, 1947, pl. 1, or for a monochrome one, see his Pelican, *Byzantine Art*, London, 1954.

brilliant and more varied, and there is a new gaiety in the work; secondly the scenes are generally much fuller, both with regard to the number of figures included and to the amount of subsidiary detail; elaborate architectural backgrounds were, for example, almost always an essential part of the composition. Thirdly, high-lights come to be used in a new and very distinctive manner. They appear on the faces and costumes not only to show where the light falls, but also to accentuate the modelling. Shading in the western manner was never practised in the Byzantine world. The colours used are often of extreme beauty in themselves, for the high-lights were added not only in white, but also in pale ochres, greens, violets, blues or purples, which appear as a sort of reflex to the colours which they overlie. In earlier times, that is to say, around 1300, they are usually thin and are laid on as delicate lines; later they become more profuse, first developing in mass and later taking on the character almost of hatching.

High-lights of the type characteristic of the earlier thirteenth century are to be seen on a very lovely icon of the archangel Michael in the Museo Civico at Pisa (pl. 5). The rather hieratic pose of the Archangel is conservative for the time; the vivid little devil at his feet savours on the other hand of western art. Yet the brilliance of the colouring, the grandeur of pose and the lovely balance of the composition attest the fact that this is a Constantinopolitan work. In these respects it may be contrasted with an icon in the Macedonian State Collections at Skopolje, which was formerly in the Church of St. Clement at Ochrida in Macedonia (pl. 6). It is one of a series of icons from that church, all obviously by the same hand. The Yugoslav authority, Milković-Pepek, seeks to identify the artist as Michael who, together with Eutychios, signed wall paintings in the same church dated to 1295.[1] It is impossible to be certain of this, but the icon is undoubtedly a Macedonian product, and its sombre matt colouring, the angular figures and the rather harsh lighting contrast markedly with the more brilliant hues, the more elegant figures and the more polished appearance of Constantinopolitan work as exemplified in the Pisa St. Michael. A date around 1300 seems likely for the Ochrida icon.

To Constantinople again, but to a rather later date, is to be assigned an icon of the Twelve Apostles, now preserved in the Museum of Fine Art at Moscow (pl. 7). The icon still shows something of the severity and reticence characteristic of earlier work, for the figures are ranged formally, against a gold background which is plain, but for an inscription giving the title of the scene, "The Assembly of the Apostles", and the names of the figures. The Apostles are no longer posed frontally but adopt various positions, full, half, or threequarter face, while the appearance and character of each individual is clearly differentiated. The figures are full and well modelled, and there is more feeling for three-dimensional space than was the case in the eleventh or twelfth centuries. The great importance that the high-lights play in the appearance of the picture is, however, striking and is typical of the age to which it belongs, the early fourteenth century.

The changes that distinguish this icon from those of earlier date like the three Saints at Moscow (pl.4) are a good deal more accentuated in an icon of the Dormition of the Virgin, also at Moscow (pl. 8). Here the high-lights are more profuse and are set on in larger patches; the composition is crowded by a mass of subsidiary figures, angels, apostles and so on; behind these are buildings, so that practically none of the plain gold background appears; and, most interesting of all, Christ does not stand in the centre, but to one side; He is shown side and not full face, and the mandorla or glory behind Him is partly obscured by figures. This departure from the rigid, formal poses of earlier times would hardly have been possible before the fourteenth century, even if the change towards greater humanism and variety did begin in the twelfth.

This icon is perhaps rather extreme in the profusion of its figures, and the crowded effect of its composition; others of the age are distinguished rather by the loveliness of their colour, by the exquisite balance of their compositions and by their deeply spiritual character. Few icons show these features to better effect than one bearing the Annunciation, also from St. Clement at Ochrida, but this time probably a Constantinopolitan, not a Macedonian, work (pl.9). The architectural background is here quite elaborate, but it is the gentle modesty of the Virgin's expression and the lovely pose of the angel that constitute the icon's chief glory. Here is a work of real mastery, a truly beautiful painting, fit to be ranked beside the great works of the Sienese or early Florentine schools. It forms the reverse of a double icon, the obverse bearing the Virgin and Child, enclosed in a rich silver mount. This too is a picture of real quality, but is in a more conservative, more conventional vein than the painting of the Annunciation, though it must belong to the same date, namely, the early fourteenth century. Milković-Pepek has sought to attribute this icon to the same painter as the Baptism (pl.6) but he wrote before the icons had been cleaned; they are now quite obviously by different hands and of basically distinct character.

A combination of the broader high-lights and the linear, hatching manner referred to above appears on an icon of the Virgin and Child now in the Tretyiakov Gallery in Moscow (pl. 10). This again is to be assigned to Constantinople, but it is less brilliant as regards colouring, and lacks the profusion of detail that characterises paintings of the picturesque style, like the Dormition shown in Plate 8. It serves indeed to show the versatility of the Constantinopolitan artists, and proves that painting there was not limited or monotonous, as was at one time supposed. The

[1] P. Milković-Pepek, "Les auteurs de quelques Ikones d'Ohrid du XIII–XIV siècle—Mihailo ou Eutihié" in *Glasnik*, 1, no. 3. Skopolje, 1954, (in Serbo-Croat, with a summary in French).



[*continued on page 24*

*Plate 2*

# THE ASCENSION AND OTHER SCENES

Ninth century

The Monastery of St. Catherine,
Mount Sinai.

Photograph: G. W. ALLAN

Ht. 35 cm. (13·75″) W. 14 cm. (5·5″)

Only part of the icon—actually a little more than half—survives. On it a number of scenes are shown, without any borders between them. At the top, to the left, is the Nativity; next to it only one figure, part of the Adoration, survives. In the centre is the Ascension; one group comprising six of the Apostles, survives, together with the figure of Christ before a Glory supported by Angels. Below is Pentecost; the Giving of Tongues is symbolised by a bust of Christ, from which rays emanate to the figures of the Apostles below.

The figures are squat, and somewhat ungainly, the style primitive, and the icon is to be assigned to a painter who had learnt in an Eastern monastic school. Typical of such work is the absence of a gold background. The work is not dissimilar from the miniatures of the Rabula gospels, done at Zagba between Syria and Mesopotamia in 586, but the wall paintings of the Church on the Island of Achthamar on Lake Van, which are probably to be dated to the latter part of the tenth century, afford an even closer parallel.[1] A date in the late eighth or ninth century thus seems most likely. Professor and Mrs. Sotiriou probably date the icon too early when they assign it to the seventh century.

G. and M. Sotiriou, *Icones du Mont Sinai*, Athens, 1956, pls. 17, 18 and 19.

[1] S. Der Nersessian, *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire*, Harvard, 1945, pl. XVII, 1.

ΑΓΙΑ

# *Plate 3*

# ST. PROKOPIOS, ST. DEMETRIOS AND ST. NESTOR

Eleventh or early twelfth century

The Monastery of St. Catherine,
Mount Sinai

Photograph: G. W. ALLAN

Ht. 45 cm. (17·7″) W. 33 cm. (18″)

The three saints are shown full face and full length, their names beside their heads. The portion of the panel on which they are painted is hollowed out; there are narrow margins at the sides, and wider ones above and below. At the centres of these are circular medallions bearing the bust of Christ. The margin all round is pale red; otherwise the background is plain.

The work as a whole is rigid, the faces are severe and the rendering hieratic. There is however a profound sense of rhythm and a considerable degree of polish distinguishes the work. The style is not that of the primitive, eastern school, illustrated by such an icon as that reproduced on Plate 2; we are, rather, in the presence of a work done in the capital or by an artist who was trained there, and the icon constitutes one of the few examples of the monumental style of icon painting of the eleventh or early twelfth century that have come down to us. It is interesting to contrast it with the rather more personal rendering that characterises the icon reproduced on Plate 4.

G. and M. Sotiriou, *Icones du Mont Sinai*, Athens, 1956, pl. 47.

# *Plate 4*

# ST. PHILIP, ST. THEODORE AND ST. DEMETRIOS

Early twelfth century

Leningrad: The Hermitage Museum

Ht. 41 cm. (16·1″) W. 50·2 cm. (19·7″)

The saints stand frontally, three-quarter length, below arcades. The arcades are in low relief and are supported on trilobe columns. At one side the border appears to have been cut.

Similar columns appear in manuscript illuminations, for example *Athens National Library* 57 or *Vienna. Theol. Gr.* 15. The manner and technique of painting is compared by Lazarev to that of the Virgin of Vladimir, which must date from soon after 1125. The icon is to be assigned to much the same date, and, like the Virgin, was painted in Constantinople and no doubt taken to Russia shortly afterwards. Progress towards the new more personal style which is so marked a characteristic of the Vladimir icon has however not gone nearly so far here, for the faces are still somewhat archaic, and there is much less intimacy. Yet the saints are all individuals and are to be distinguished one from the other not only because of iconographical factors, but also because their individuality, their personalities, are different. This is clearly apparent if the icon is contrasted with that depicted on Plate 3, which is not only earlier in date, but is also in a more "monumental" style.

*Exhibition of Byzantine Art*, Edinburgh-London, 1958, No. 207. *Lazarev*, "History of Byzantine Painting", Moscow, 1947, (in Russian), pl. 201 and p. 324.

# *Plate 5*

# THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

Thirteenth century

Pisa, Museo Civico

Ht. 32·8 cm. (12·9″) W. 24·5 cm. (9·5″)

The Archangel stands full face, his right hand raised to hold a spear with which he transfixes the devil, his left supporting at the same time a medallion with the Child Christ upon it and the scales, in which souls are being weighed. The painted area of the panel is hollowed, so as to form an arch above the Saint. The background is completely plain, but for a small area at the bottom which denotes the ground.

The severe, static pose, the grand, monumental appearance, and the absence of supplementary detail may be contrasted with the profusion to be seen on such an icon as the Moscow Dormition (pl.8). They indicate a date before the more picturesque, more lively Palaeologue style had developed, but at the same time support a Constantinopolitan provenance. As to date, the earlier thirteenth century seems most likely, for the high-lights are of a type that had hardly been developed in the twelfth. This would however mean that the icon was painted during the days of Latin dominance between 1204 and 1261. Such a thing is possible, for even if the rulers were Catholics, the population of the city did not change; many of the Greeks lived on there, and they had their own churches even if Sancta Sophia was used for the Latin rite. We do not know of any large scale decorations done in these years, but we do know that books were illuminated, and there is every reason to suppose that other small scale work was done also. A date around 1225 is thus both possible and probable.

*Exhibition of Byzantine Art*, Edinburgh-London, 1958, No. 170. Lazarev, op. cit. I p. 352, notes 127 and 128, and II, pl. 274. V. Weidlé, *Le Icone Bizantine e Russe*, pl. 21.

# *Plate 6*

# THE BAPTISM

*c.* 1300

Macedonian State Collections, Skopolje

Ht. 56 cm. (22″). W. 49 cm. (19.3)

The Baptist stands on our Lord's right, on a formalised crag; on the opposite side of our Lord are four angels, with similar formalised rocks behind them. Our Lord, in simple loin cloth, stands above the water, not in it, as is sometimes the case; above Him is a ray of glory. Below, to His right, is a small figure of Hellenistic type, the allegory of the river Jordan; on the opposite side is the allegory of the Dead Sea. Below the Baptist are an axe, very large, and a tree, very small, illustrating the text, "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees" (Matt., 3.10). The painted surface is hollowed, with a fairly wide margin. A small area has been left beside the Baptist to indicate the original state of the icon before cleaning.

The icon formed one of a series, on which the so-called "Twelve Feasts" were shown; it belonged to the Iconostasis of the church of St. Clement at Ochrid. Several other icons of the series are also preserved. All show the rather crowded compositions and vigorous, expressive movements characteristic of the Macedonian school, and the rather sombre, matt colouring is also typical. Milković-Pepek assigns them to the painter Michael, who was associated with Eutychios in executing the wall paintings in the same church, dated to 1295. Milković-Pepek's suggestion seems quite likely; the icon certainly dates from around 1300.

*Exhibition of Byzantine Art,* Edinburgh-London, 1958, No. 219. Milković-Pepek, "Les auteurs de quelques Ikones d'Ohrid du XIII-XIV siècle—Mihailo ou Eutihié", *Glasnik,* I, Skopolje, 1954, p. 23.

# *Plate 7*

# THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Early fourteenth century

The Museum of Fine Art, Moscow

Ht. 38 cm. (15″) W. 33 cm. (13″)

The Apostles stand in two ranks, the four Evangelists, with large haloes, in front, the eight others behind, without haloes. Their names are above their heads, and above these is an inscription reading "The Assembly of the Twelve Apostles".

Apart from the lettering the background is plain, and in this contrasts markedly with icons like the Dormition on Plate 8. The greater severity in this respect however is in opposition to the vivid expressiveness of the individual figures. The position of each varies from half to three-quarter or full face, and the character and personality of each is also clearly indicated. The high lights, put on in broad patches, are very extensive and also very effective. The way they are laid on, the expressive features, and the general character of the style, all support a date in the first half of the fourteenth century; one not far off 1340 is most likely. The icon, though found in Russia, is undoubtedly a Constantinopolitan product, and the mingling of grandeur and reticence, expressiveness and vigour, is typical of the most accomplished studios of the capital. Certain of the ivories of the "Court" school, like a lovely one with the Forty Martyrs at Berlin, may be compared.

*Exhibition of Byzantine Art*, Edinburgh-London, 1958, No. 208. *Lazarev*, op. cit. I pl. XLVI and II pl. 305. See also Lazarev, *Burlington Magazine*, LXXI, 1957, p. 251.

# *Plate 8*

# THE DORMITION OF THE VIRGIN

Fourteenth century

Moscow, The Museum of Fine Art

Ht. 45·5cm. (17·9″) W. 33·5 cm. (13·1″)

The body of the Virgin is extended on a bier in the front of the picture. At either end and behind are mourning Apostles; behind her head is our Lord, before a brilliant mandorla or glory, holding her soul in the form of a swaddled figure. Behind again are angels, and in the background at either side, are buildings.

The composition is very full; so full, indeed, that practically none of the background is visible. This in itself is a feature which indicates a comparatively late date; in the eleventh or twelfth century the open background almost invariably constituted an important part of every picture. The nature of the buildings in the background is also characteristic of the fourteenth century; they may be compared with those in the mosaics of Kariye Cami at Constantinople, of *c.* 1310. At Kariye however the compositions are much less crowded, and on the basis of this evidence one would assign the icon to a later date than the mosaics; the second rather than the first half of the fourteenth century is probable. A date at this time is also borne out by the nature of the high-lights, which appear as broad patches of white on the faces, and as subtle reflex colours on the costumes; earlier they were less profuse, later they were often put on in thin parallel lines, like the hatching on an architectural drawing. The work is particularly delicate, as delicate as in a miniature painting; but the icon has, nevertheless, a certain monumental character which is brought out by the very balanced nature of the colouring.

*Exhibition of Byzantine Art*, Edinburgh-London, 1958, No. 233. *Lazarev*, op. cit. pl. 306.

# *Plate 9*

# THE ANNUNCIATION

*c.* 1300

Macedonian State Collections

Ht. 92 cm. (36.2″) W. 68 cm. (26.7″)

The icon is actually a double one and was of a processional character. The places where a staff was attached for holding it aloft can be seen at the bottom. Such processional icons are not uncommon; they are invariably painted on both sides, and this one, like nearly all the others, bears the Virgin and Child on the principal face. She is shown half-length in the pose of Hodegetria (Indicator of the Way) and bears the special designation, "The Saviour of Souls". The background and border above the level of the shoulders are covered with a finely wrought silver mount.

The reverse of the icon, which is illustrated here, bears the Annunciation. The Virgin is seated below a canopy; the angel approaches from her right; behind is an elaborate architectural composition. The panel is slightly hollowed, with a wide margin. The colours are brilliant, the technique accomplished, and the feeling of movement and expression is most effective. Especially subtle is the Virgin's expression of shy modesty.

The Yugoslav authority Milković-Pepek has suggested that the icon should be assigned to the brush of a painter named Michael who along with another master, Eutychios, signed the wall paintings in the church of St. Clement at Ochrida, where the icon was originally preserved. The wall paintings are dated to 1295. That the icon was painted about this time can hardly be disputed. Milković-Pepek wrote, however, before the icon had been cleaned; its style and colouring are very different from those of the wall paintings or of other icons from the church, such as that illustrated on Plate 6, so that his suggestion does not seem likely. Indeed, a Constantinopolitan provenance, or an attribution to a Constantinopolitan painter, seems much more probable, and the icon may be regarded as giving a very clear idea of the best Constantinople work of about 1300. It is indeed one of the most lovely icons that have come down to us.

*Exhibition of Byzantine Art*, Edinburgh-London, 1958, Nos. 228 and 232. Corović-Lubinković, *The Icons of Ochrida*, Beograd, 1953, pl. 2. P. Milković-Pepek "Les auteurs de quelques Ikones d'Ohrid du XIII-XIV siècle—Mihailo ou Eutihié", *Glasnik*, I, No. 3, Skopolje, 1954.

ΧΑΙΡΕ

# *Plate 10*

# THE VIRGIN AND CHILD

Later fourteenth century

Moscow, The Tretyakov Gallery

Ht. 76.5 cm. (30.1″) W. 62.5 cm. (24.5″)

The pose is that known as the Hodegetria, the Virgin holding the Child on her left arm, while she points to Him with her right hand, and indicates Him as the "Way of Salvation". She bears the special designation "of Pimen" but this must have become associated with her in Russia, for the icon is a Constantinopolitan, not a Russian work. It must have been painted in the capital towards the end of the fourteenth century.

The long, very delicate face of the Virgin and the tender, contemplative expression, combined with the technique, where the high-lights are put on in wide sweeps on the faces, but where they have all-over, linear character on the Child's costume, indicate that the icon belongs to a type which owed its origin to Constantinople, but which was copied extensively in Greece and more especially in the Adriatic region in the later fourteenth and earlier fifteenth centuries. Renderings of the Virgin and Child which are closely akin in style were, for example, produced in Venice both by Greek painters who had settled there and by Italians working in a "Greek" manner; numerous examples are to found in Venice itself and in collections in Italy. They are sometimes termed Italo-Greek, but a more exact designation for them would be "Adriatic School". The problem of what exactly constitutes the Italo-Greek school is a much more complicated one, which will be treated by the writer in the forthcoming "Encyclopedia dell'Arte".

*Exhibition of Byzantine Art*, Edinburgh-London, 1958, No. 223. *Lazarev*, op. cit. pl. 322 and pp. 228–229.

*continued from page 5*]
icon is in a style which was followed in other areas, more especially the northern Adriatic, and there is a large group of Madonnas produced in Venice in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which owes its origin to Constantinopolitan products of the type of this panel. The Virgin on it bears a special designation, "Our Lady of Pimen". The icon must have been taken to Russia at an early date and the special designation accrued to it there, but it is certainly not a Russian product. It must have been painted towards the end of the fourteenth century.

Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, and most of Greece and the Balkans were already in Moslem hands even before this. But that did not mean the end of all production, for the Christian communities in the Turkish empire enjoyed a considerable degree of independence. Much fine work was indeed done down to as late as the sixteenth century, and the best of the icons preserved in the extensive collections of Athens, Belgrade, Skopolje and Sofia, or in their thousands in churches all over Greece and the Balkans, nearly all belong to these later centuries. Many are works of real quality, and show great diversity of style. A considerable number of new and distinct schools of painting developed in Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria in these centuries, and even in certain parts of Italy, for there were large Greek colonies in the south and more particularly at Venice. And in Russia of course, there were numerous local schools where work of a very individual character was done; indeed it was in Russia that the art of icon painting reached its apogee in the fifteenth century. But all these schools, whether in Greek lands or Slav, in the far north or even in Venice, owed their origin to Byzantium. The magnitude of Constantinople's rôle, in fact, can hardly be exaggerated, and the majority of the works that are reproduced in this book serve to give an idea—albeit an incomplete one—of the nature and the quality of the panel painting that was done in the Byzantine capital. Though examples are few, there are enough to show that the icons of this last age of Byzantine art constituted one of the great schools of European painting.

## *Note on Plate 1*

# THE THREE HEBREWS IN THE FIERY FURNACE

Seventh century

Monastery of St. Catherine,
Mount Sinai

Photograph: G. W. ALLAN

Ht. 34 cm. (13·4″) W. 50 cm. (19.8″)

The three Hebrews stand full face, their hands raised in the Orans position; the angel, who holds a rod before them, is shown side face. The icon is in the encaustic technique, where coloured waxes were used for pigment. A portion of the painting is missing at the top. The border, which serves as a frame, and the inscription upon it, represent a later addition.

The encaustic technique seems to have been in special favour at Alexandria; it went out of use around the seventh century. The attitudes of the figures, akin to those in renderings of the same scene in wall paintings in the catacombs of Rome, also suggest an early date. The angel is a very Hellenistic figure, and its rendering shows something of the elegance of Greek art. The icon is no doubt to be assigned to a painter who had been schooled at Alexandria. Professor and Mrs. Sotiriou date the group to which they assign it to between the fifth and the seventh centuries; a date in the earlier seventh century seems likely for this panel.

G. and M. Sotiriou, *Icons of Mount Sinai*, Athens, 1956, pl. 12 and 13.

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# *The Faber Gallery of Oriental Art*

with an introduction and notes by the author named

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MUGHAL PAINTING—J. V. S. WILKINSON

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